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NETHERLANDS: INF Politics

Prime Minister van Agt is trying to strengthen the case for a positive Dutch decision on INF in the face of continuing widespread domestic political opposition. [redacted]

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Van Agt has written an unusually forthright newspaper article in which he calls on the parties that will form the next coalition government after the election on 8 September to agree to a specific deadline for an INF decision. He urged the deadline be no later than December 1983. [redacted]

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Comment: Van Agt's readiness to discuss so volatile a subject less than a month before the election suggests he is becoming more confident that the public mood is changing. He probably also is testing reactions in his party to a more positive stand on deployment and getting a pro-INF statement on the record in the event a center-right coalition emerges. [redacted]

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There has been widespread speculation that van Agt, as Christian Democratic leader, is using the INF issue more cynically. He may calculate a more favorable attitude on INF will dissuade the anti-INF Labor Party from joining a new coalition, making it easier for him to form the coalition he wants. [redacted]

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Van Agt may be overconfident. Polls indicate INF continues to be unpopular with a majority of voters, and its opponents are better organized than those in other West European countries. [redacted]

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Although van Agt probably can carry the bulk of his party with him, many Christian Democrats will be unhappy that the issue has been raised before the elections. A strong bloc of Christian Democratic deputies still oppose INF. Unless the Christian Democrats and Liberals win 85 or more of the 150 seats, they may have to depend on the uncertain support of the small Democrats '66 party, which is split on the INF issue. [redacted]

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